

THE ANOMALOUS וּבְכַל הָאָרֶץ IN GENESIS 1:26 A PROPOSED EMENDATION

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XMR: 43F3Cw8pPyY4RbebuZrVHTSZkt2zpxukK66LAeV1Km1d9vHipZzPHQkFLzy2EJEGvejhdDLPJw8dCRhngmqP36nV9wZGqxA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the anomalous phrase וּבְכַל הָאָרֶץ found in Genesis 1:26 in all three of the principle textual witnesses. While the prevailing view is that the variant reading וּבְכַל חַיֵּית הָאָרֶץ found in the Peshitta is to be preferred, here it is proposed that a simple omission of the conjunction ו actually yields the preferred reading.

THE ANOMALOUS READING

All three of the main witnesses to the text of the Hebrew Bible, the Masoretic Text (M), the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), and the Septuagint (G), contain a reading in Gen 1:26 that has been viewed as anomalous in its context. The reading in question is indicated with solid underlining below in the following citations of these three witnesses:¹

MASORETIC TEXT (M)

26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְּדִגְתַּת הַיָּם
וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-
הָאָרֶץ:

²⁶ Then *Elohim* said, “Let us make mankind in our image, according to our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and over the flying creatures of the heavens and over the docile creatures and over all the earth and over the scurrying creatures that scurry over the earth.”

SAMARITAN PENTATEUCH (SP)

26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ וּכְדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְּדִגְתַּת הַיָּם
וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-
הָאָרֶץ:

26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ וּכְדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְּדִגְתַּת הַיָּם
וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-
הָאָרֶץ:

²⁶ Then *Elohim* said, “Let us make mankind in our image and according to our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and over the flying creatures of the heavens and over the docile creatures and over all the earth and over the scurrying creatures that scurry over the earth.”

¹ SP and G are given here with their Tiberian Hebrew equivalents to make for easy comparison. Note that words with dashed underlining indicate additional variants which fall outside the main scope of the present paper.

SEPTUAGINT (G)

²⁶ καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν, καὶ ἀρχέτωσαν τῶν ἰχθύων τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τῶν πετεινῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῶν κτηνῶν καὶ πάσης τῆς γῆς καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐρπετῶν τῶν ἐρπόντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

²⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ וְכִדְמוֹתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

²⁶ Then *Elohim* said, “Let us make mankind in our image and according to our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and over the flying creatures of the heavens and over the docile creatures and over all the earth and over the scurrying creatures that scurry over the earth.”

Hendel puts his finger on the problem with the reading in question by saying, “While humans are told to subdue the earth (וכבשה) in v 28, the reference to ‘all the earth’ seems odd in the zoological context of v 26.”² However, in addition to these three main textual witnesses there is still another reading found in the Peshitta which has been given considerable weight by commentators:

PESHITTA (S)

²⁶ אָמַר אֱלֹהִים: נַחֲבֵה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ וְכִדְמוֹתֵנוּ: וַיְרִדוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם: וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם: וּבַבְּהֵמָה: וּבְכָל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ: וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

²⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ וְכִדְמוֹתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

²⁶ Then *Elohim* said, “Let us make mankind in our image, according to our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and over the flying creatures of the heavens and over the docile creatures and over all the wild creatures of the earth and over the scurrying creatures that scurry over the earth.”

² Hendel, *Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42.

The exegete is thus faced with two questions: How does one explain the anomalous phrase **ובכל הארץ** “and over all the earth” in M, SP, and G? How should one regard the reading **ובכל חית הארץ** “and over all the wild creatures of the earth” in S?

THE PREFERRED READING?

Hendel relates that the prevailing view among commentators is that the reading **ובכל הארץ** “and over all the wild creatures of the earth” in S is to be preferred.³ However, it is interesting to observe that none of the commentators cited by Hendel actually offers a plausible scenario to explain just *how* the rejected reading **ובכל הארץ** “and over all the earth” originated beyond a mere assertion that **חית** “the wild creatures of” was omitted.⁴ Hendel for his part calls for caution in preferring the reading in S based not only on the singularity of the evidence, but also on the possibility that the reading might be due to harmonization.⁵ He instead offers his own solution to the textual problem which he finds to be more satisfactory:

A more prudent solution is to posit that the anomalous phrase **ובכל הארץ**, shared by all the major versions, is an early scribal error. It may be a harmonizing or explicating plus, intended to include the earth under human rule in v 26 as it is in v 28 (note that **וכבשה**, “and subdue it [the earth],” precedes the blessing to rule over the animals). Perhaps more likely (since accidental), it may be the result of a haplography of an original phrase, **ובכל הרמש הרמש על הארץ**, in which the scribe’s eye jumped from **ובכל ה-** to **הארץ**, triggered by the identical sequence **ל-ה**. To complete this explanation, the corrupt phrase may then have been corrected by the insertion of the correct (original) phrase, yielding a final text: **ובכל הארץ ובכל הרמש הרמש על הארץ**. This solution, while conjectural, is perhaps more satisfactory than the alternatives: either staying with the the [sic!] dubious reading of the major versions or preferring the probably harmonistic reading of Syr.⁶

Hendel’s proposed solution results in a critical text which omits the anomalous phrase entirely:⁷

26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצִלְמֵנוּ כְּדִמוֹתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם
וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ For the commentators cited by Hendel, see Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, 42.

⁵ Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, 42. *BHQ* finds this to be the case since it attributes the variant in S to assimilation to v. 25.

⁶ Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, 42–3.

⁷ Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, 123.

²⁶ Then *Elohim* said, “Let us make mankind in our image, according to our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and over the flying creatures of the heavens and over the docile creatures and over the scurrying creatures that scurry over the earth.”

While Hendel’s proposal results in an improved text which addresses the anomalous phrase, his scenario for the development of the text appears to be more complicated than is necessary to alleviate the textual problem and is therefore unsatisfactory. Yet one is not thereby forced to choose one of the two choices Hendel sets out, for there is another solution to the textual problem which is more parsimonious to the one Hendel advances.

THE EMENDED READING

Hendel is right to note that the “zoological context” of the list highlights the anomalousness of the phrase **ובכל הארץ** “and over all the earth.” Yet as one considers that context, it can be observed that each of the creatures is listed in relation to an environment *except for the mention of “the docile creatures” which directly precedes the anomalous phrase*. In light of this observation, the following alternative scenario to explain the textual data immediately presents itself:

1. The earliest inferable text is no longer extant in any of the textual witnesses, but is inferable from a recognition of both the anomalousness of the phrase **ובכל הארץ** “and over all the earth” in its zoological context *and* the singular omission of an environment in connection with the phrase **ובבהמה** “and over the docile creatures” in M, SP, and G. One need only omit the conjunction **ו** “and” between the two phrases to recover an original reading **ובבהמה בכל הארץ** “and over the docile creatures throughout all the earth” to resolve both of these issues.⁸
2. M, SP, and G all evidence a secondary reading in which a scribe, interpreting the preposition **ב** in the phrase **בכל הארץ** “throughout all the earth” in line with the other instances of the preposition in the verse, “corrected” the text by adding the conjunction **ו** before the preposition to ensure the preposition’s interpretation in relation to the verb **וירדו** “so that they may rule.”
3. S evidences a reading secondary to M, SP, and G in which S or its *Vorlage* “corrected” the odd phrase **ובכל הארץ** “and over all the earth” in light of its zoological context by introducing **חית** “the wild creatures of” into the phrase in agreement with the phrase in v 25. That S is secondary to M, SP, and G is

⁸ For the meaning “throughout” for the preposition **ב**, see DCH s.v. **ב** 1.

evident from the fact that S also omits an environment with the phrase **וּבְהֵמָה** “and over the docile creatures.”

The resulting critical text together with the proposed scenario for the development of the text is laid out more simply on the following page.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion has not only yielded what appears to be the earliest inferable text, but a more plausible scenario for how the anomalous phrase in M, SP, and G originated. The present author is at a loss to explain how such a simple solution to the textual problem, the mere omission of a conjunction, has not been proposed earlier. It may well be that a more thorough consultation of the literature would yield the solution’s prior proposal given its simplicity. The present author will of course be happy to acknowledge the scholar who made the proposal previously if this is indeed the case in a future revision of this paper.

1. CRITICAL TEXT

Original Composition

²⁶ ... וַיִּרְדּוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-
הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

²⁶ ... so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and over the flying creatures of the heavens and over the docile creatures *throughout* all the earth and over the scurrying creatures that scurry over the earth.”



2. THE TEXT OF M SP AND G-*VORLAGE*

First “Corrected” Text

²⁶ ... וַיִּרְדּוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ
וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

²⁶ ... so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and over the flying creatures of the heavens and over the docile creatures **and** over all the earth and over the scurrying creatures that scurry over the earth.”



3. THE TEXT OF S

Second “Corrected” Text

²⁶ ... וַיִּרְדּוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ
וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

²⁶ ... so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and over the flying creatures of the heavens and over the docile creatures and over all **the wild creatures of** the earth and over the scurrying creatures that scurry over the earth.”

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